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Navy says it's working on pollution

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The Navy — which may have two Jacksonville bases placed on the federal Superfund list and is trying to fix a leak in a jet fuel pipeline — gave assurances yesterday that it was working as quickly as possible to clean up the pollution problems.

Concerns about the contaminants were discussed at a meeting called by state Rep. Stephen Wise, R-Jacksonville, who represents neighborhoods near the Jacksonville Naval Air Station on the St. Johns River and Cecil Field Naval Air Station on the Westside.

Last week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed adding both bases to its Superfund list of the worst hazardous waste sites in the nation.

At the same time, the Navy is attempting to locate a leak in a buried pipeline that carries jet fuel from Jacksonville NAS to Cecil Field.

The Navy has hired a contractor, scheduled to arrive Wednesday, that will attempt to find the leak, said Cmdr. Deane Leidholt, a public works officer at Cecil Field. The pipeline was drained after officials suspected a leak existed.

The fuel contamination appears to be in an area on 103rd Street between Harlow Boulevard and Daniell Terrace, Leidholt said. The Navy hopes to test land owned by seven different property owners, he said.

State health officials are expected to check private wells in the area next week, said Ernie Frey, deputy assistant secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation's regional office in Jacksonville.

Once the contamination is located, a Navy cleanup plan will be developed and enacted, Leidholt said.

Capt. Frank Herron, Cecil Field's commanding officer, said that in order to conduct the repairs, traffic on 103rd Street might have to be disrupted.

As for the Superfund listing, Herron said the Navy expected Cecil Field to be added to the cleanup list. He said the base already had formed a technical review committee to review the hazardous waste problems and would recommend how the waste should be cleaned up.

The EPA has said that 2,200 residents with private drinking water wells living within 3 miles of the base could be threatened by groundwater contamination from Cecil Field. At Jacksonville NAS, 360 residents could be affected, the EPA said.

Officials for the Navy and the DNR have said, however, that they do not think any contaminants have spread off either base.

"We feel confident there is no pollution off the base property," Herron said.

Wise said he planned to have a similar meeting with officials from NAS.